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TAGS: PREL PINS PGOV MA FR

SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR: FRANCE OFFERS REFUGE TO MAYOR,  
ARCHBISHOP TO TAKE HIM IN

Classified By: Political Officer Gregory D'Elia, 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) MFA Madagascar deskoff Beatrice Lederle on March 10 confirmed that Antananarivo Mayor Rajoelina had obtained refuge with the GOF on March 6 and had been housed at the French Ambassador's Residence since then. Lederle said that the French hoped to transfer Rajoelina to the custody of the Archbishop of Antananarivo on March 11, if not during the evening of March 10.

¶2. (S) Lederle said that Rajoelina's presence at the Residence came in dramatic fashion. She said that President Ravalomanana had ordered Rajoelina's arrest on March 5. However, Lederle said that the French obtained information indicating that Ravalomanana had verbally ordered that security forces were authorized to kill Rajoelina if he resisted arrest.

¶3. (C) According to Lederle, Rajoelina on March 6, while being pursued, stormed his way into the vehicle of the French Charge d'Affaires, who had no choice but to allow him into the vehicle. "If we hadn't, he could have been killed right in front of us," Lederle said. Rajoelina was then taken to the Residence, where he has been ever since.

¶4. (C) The French kept quiet about this until today (March 10). The Government, although aware of Rajoelina's presence at the French Residence, chose not to mention this publicly as well. Lederle said that the French worked to find another place for Rajoelina, not wanting to risk the potential harm that could arise if the public learned that they were sheltering Rajoelina (although this was not by choice, Lederle reminded). Eventually the Archbishop said that he would assume care of Rajoelina. Transfer could not be effected on March 10 because of crowds around the French Embassy but would take place on March 11, or later on March 10 if conditions permit. Lederle said that the crowds around the French Embassy were not that big and that the media had exaggerated the situation during the course of March 10.

¶5. (C) Lederle hoped that the incident would pass without further consequences. She expressed frustration with the overall situation in Madagascar and the limited means available to outside parties to influence events. The two sides had few alternatives to talking through their differences but, unfortunately, the international community had little leverage over them. Lederle said that she would keep us informed as appropriate.

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